

**Testimony to the Illinois Department on Aging Solutions Event:
Older Americans Act Reauthorization**

Wednesday July, 6. 2005

Springfield, Illinois

My name is Susan Vega, I am the NCLR Program Coordinator at Alivio Medical Center and am presenting this testimony on behalf of Carmen Velasquez, Executive Director of Alivio Medical Center.

We are pleased to have been invited to the Illinois Department on Aging's Solutions Event: Older Americans Act Reauthorization. We are especially interested in sharing some of the issues and challenges that many older people and their families face in the communities Alivio serves.

Alivio serves significant numbers of patients over the age of fifty-five. Recently, through funding from the National Council of La Raza, we have been in a better position to reach out to the elders in our community to bring them information about services and programs for which they might be eligible. Most of our patients live in Chicago, but we also have increasing numbers of people coming from suburban Cook County and beyond. No matter where our patients and their families come from, however, it is clear that more needs to be done in the area of outreach, especially for those whose first language is Spanish.

We hear over, and over again that information about various programs, including the State's Circuit Breaker and SeniorCare programs has not reached them until we are talking to them. Many of our patients can benefit from the Medicare Savings Programs, administered through the Illinois Department of Public Aid, but have never heard of them. Because many of the people in our communities are immigrants, they often do not trust governmental or quasi-governmental agencies. Those same people, however, do trust Alivio Medical Center and other community-based organizations. We encourage the State of Illinois to strongly advocate for resources to meet the needs of our communities and other communities where English is not the first language of many of the older residents. We also urge the Illinois Department on Aging to advocate for enough resources to reach out to the large number of people with limited incomes that could benefit from the Medicare Savings Programs and programs that help to pay for medication.

We have seen first hand that these programs improve the quality of life for not only the person receiving the benefit, but also for the families that have been supporting that person. We need to make sure the message is getting out to as many people as possible and that we are doing the hard job of following up with the most difficult to reach. It is not enough to present at senior clubs, retirement buildings and other traditional venues. We need to do more and we need to do better.

Alivio Medical Center recently entered into a partnership with the City of Chicago's Department on Aging to provide the people of our communities the opportunity to have a link to the Benefits Check Up program. We applaud the Department's efforts to reach out to 'non-traditional' partners to provide excellent services in a culturally and linguistically competent manner. Alivio will be working hard to assure that we are getting the word out to our patients and the community at-large regarding the help that people can receive.

Thank you for the opportunity to give this testimony.